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Abraham Webster Scribner

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Précis

Abraham Webster Scribner was a Savannah shoe merchant of the early nineteenth century. He was born around 1785, and died on September 19, 1817 at age 32. Scribner married Margaret S. Williams on November 8, 1808. He was 23 years of age and she was 16 years of age. The Scribners had two children, Sarah Harmon, and Benjamin James. Both children died at age 4, Sarah in 1814 and Benjamin in 1816. Scribner's wife, Margaret, died at age 25, in 1817 just five months before his death.

In the six or seven year span of Scribner's business activities noted herein, a steady rise and an unsuccessful end may be seen. But, because of the early date involved, little concise actual information is available. There are pieces to this puzzle that are missing, and they will always will be, but a reasonably accurate account is found within.

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The life of a Savannah merchant during the early nineteenth century can perhaps best be traced through his business affairs. Abraham Webster Scribner was one such man, being a merchant of shoes. Although Scribner's career lasted only six years or so, the trivial dealings this man had with his fellow Savannahians leave a fair account of his business and family life. For ease of reading (and for ease of writing) a chronological narrative would perhaps be the best method of presenting this material.

Abraham Webster Scribner was born around the year 1785.¹ This date can only be ascertained from Scribner's age at his death. The newspaper obituary in the Columbia Museum & Savannah Advertiser listed Scribner as being thirty years at his death.² The marker in Colonial Cemetery indicates that Scribner was thirty-two years of age at his death. The latter source in this instance is the most accurate, as the marker was erected by Scribner's mother-in-law, Eliza Williams.

The first twenty-one years of Scribner's life are a mystery. No records were found telling what his early years were like or where they were spent. The first information found was an advertisement placed in the Columbia Museum & Savannah Advertiser of December 20, 1806.³ The ad was for A. Scribner Shoes, "on Bay almost across from the Exchange." This was the year that Scribner was twenty-one years of age. Because this was the first reference to Scribner's business, it could perhaps be surmised that his coming of age legally and his entrance into the business world were linked. There is however, no evidence to corroborate this idea.

The following year, 1807, brought the alteration of Scribner's firm from A. Scribner & Co. to Taylor & Scribner.⁴ This new addition brought shoe manufacture into the firm along with the original shoe selling concern. This partnership lasted until 1810.

The year 1808 brought tax troubles and a new wife to Abraham Scribner. On February 2, the firm of Taylor & Scribner was

was listed as being in default on their taxes.⁵ The firm apparently paid the required amount as there was no other mention of this incident. On November 9 of that year, Abraham W. Scribner and Margaret S. Williams were issued a marriage license.⁶ There is no date listed for the actual ceremony, but it was performed by the Reverend H. Holcombe.⁷

In 1809, Scribner was ordered by the clerk of the Inferior Court to serve as a constable for a period of one year.⁸ Whether Scribner actually served was not ascertained. This was also the first year Scribner appeared in the Savannah Tax Digests. He was merely taxed for "stock in trade," valued at \$2,700.00.⁹

The year 1810 saw the dissolving of two of Scribners partnerships, a fine of ten dollars, and an indication that his shoe trade was pretty lucrative. On January 3, the partnership of A. W. Scribner and John Delberghe (a local grocer) was dissolved.¹⁰ Apparently Delberghe owed money to Scribner because all those owing money to the firm, were instructed to pay Scribner. Scribner's failure to show for jury duty on the Petit Court cost him ten dollars.¹¹ This was the first of several such fines placed on Scribner because of his apparent lack of civic duty. The firm of Taylor & Scribner was dissolved on April 5.¹² The newspaper announcement of this dissovlement linked Abraham W. Scribner to Benjamin James Scribner.¹³ Most probably, B. J. Scribner was A. W. Scribner's brother, as they were in the same business, and as A. W. Scribner named his only son after B. J. Scribner. Throughout the year 1810, many advertisements appeared in the two major newspapers in the Savannah area. The Columbia Museum & Savannah Advertiser and the Republican & Savannah Evening Ledger both carried Scribner ads in almost every issue. There are also examples of single issues carrying more than one advertisement such as the July 31 issue of the Republican & Savannah Evening Ledger.¹⁴ Finally, Scribner was elected treasurer of the Savannah Association of Mechanics on December 20.¹⁵

The year 1811 was perhaps the most significant one as far as Scribners financial affairs are concerned. For it was in

that year that evidence appears indicating the failing of Scribners business ventures. On January 3, Scribner publicly urged those indebted to him to settle their accounts as soon as possible.¹⁶ January 31 found Scribner once again failing to report for jury duty. This time it was for the Mayors Court, and he was ordered to file "just excuse" for defaulting or be fined ten dollars.¹⁷ The arrival of the ship "Little Sally", a brig out of Plymouth, England, brought Scribner an unsuccessful chance to purchase her. The District Marshall found the ship in violation of an "act of Congress" regulating trade with Great Britain. All persons who held claim to the vessel were requested to appear before an Admiralty Court held on June 10, 1811.¹⁸ This court apparently held that Scribner had not upheld his duties as purchaser of the vessel, for she was offered for sale at public auction on June 11.¹⁹ The June 13 issue of the Republican & Savannah Evening Ledger contained a piece entitled "Caution to the Public." This piece was written by Scribner as an attempt to explain his claim on the ship. In it, he states that a writ of mandamus had been filed with the district judge ordering Customs to issue the registry to Scribner. He further wonders why the district marshall would attempt to have the vessel sold while the mandamus was pending.²⁰ Scribner lost his attempt to obtain the vessel, which appeared later under a different name. This venture probably cost Scribner a good deal of money, for it is at this point that his business begins to decline. On July 4, the Republican & Savannah Evening Ledger ran an ad for a city sheriffs sale of "sundry furniture believed to be that of A. W. Scribner." The list included; 1 sideboard, 1 dinner table, 1 tea table, 6 chairs, 1 sofa, and 1 demijohn. This sale was held in order to satisfy two executors, T. W. Rodman and David Johnston.²¹ September 11, saw the death of Scribner's younger brother, Uriah, who at age 12, died after a "slight indisposition."²²

The Tax Digests of 1811 showed that Scribner had been taxed for, among other things, "buildings on lot 20, Columbia Ward." This is the house Scribner had built. It was assessed at \$840.00

and the yearly tax was \$37.90. Scribner was also taxed for his "stock in trade" which had risen in value from \$2,700.00 in 1809 to \$4,000.00 that year (1811), and for his sofachair which was later sold at the sheriff's sale.²³

The last month of 1811 and the first month of 1812 both record one of the last indicators of Scribners financial situation. On December 10, 1811, an announcement in the Republican & Savannah Evening Ledger stated that Richard M. Stites and Benjamin B. Norris were named as "assignees to the effects and the estate of the A. W. Scribner Co."²⁴ An announcement to this same effect was ran in the Columbia Museum & Savannah Advertiser of January 2, 1812.²⁵ This practice was usually done in order to satisfy as many creditors as possible when a firm was facing bankruptcy. This was perhaps the case with Scribner although this hasn't been determined for sure. He did occupy the store until at least March 5 as a notice for a sheriff's sale indicates. The sale was of a "tenemented kitchen and shed attached to the store occupied by A. W. Scribner. (lot 6, Derby Ward.)"²⁶

Once again, Scribner's failure to appear for jury duty cost him money. This time it was a twenty dollar fine for defaulting on duty for the Petit Court held January 23.²⁷

In February of that year, Benjamin Scribner opened his own shoe store, selling shoes for "cash only."²⁸ July brought Abraham Scribner's election as first corporal of the Savannah Heavy Artillery,²⁹ while September brought another fine for ten dollars. This time it was for defaulting on the Mayors Court³⁰

The Savannah Tax Digest of 1813 indicates that Scribner paid taxes on his house the first quarter of that year. His mother-in-law, Mrs. Eliza Williams apparently paid it for the second quarter, while from the third quarter on, a Mrs. Carson began paying the taxes.³¹ Apparently the house changed hands but the Scribners didn't move for Margaret Scribner (Abraham's wife) died in this house in 1817.³²

Sarah Harmon Scribner aged four years and eight months died on July 16, 1814. She was Scribners only daughter, and the

first to die of his two children. Her funeral was held at a Mrs. Leavers boarding house. The Reverend Dr. D. L. Kollock presided.³³ Scribner's only son, died at age 4 on January 20, 1816. His funeral was held at the same place.³⁴ There are several conflicting dates concerning Benjamin's death. One source says that death occurred on January 11, while another lists the date as July 20. The date quoted here is the one found on the family grave marker in Colonial Cemetery. Margaret S. Scribner soon followed her two children to the grave. Her death occurred April 10, 1817. She apparently died of a "consumption" (T.B.), and her funeral was held at Mrs. Carson's boarding house.³⁵ A. W. Scribner was the last to die. His death occurred on September 19, 1817, just a few short months after his wife's death.³⁶ In a span of three years, Scribner's immediate family died out. This of course, prevents the tracing of a living relative. But oddly enough, even the tracing of a relative through Scribner's brother Benjamin, seems to be impossible. After his brother's death, there appeared no business ads for B. J. Scribner's store. Also, Benjamin Scribner doesn't appear in the 1820 census or any subsequent ones. It would seem that for some reason, Benjamin Scribner left Savannah however, there has been no evidence found that would definitely prove this theory.

Endnotes

1. Scribner family grave marker located at the west side of Colonial Cemetary, Savannah, Georgia.
2. Columbia Museum & Savannah Advertiser; September 20, 1817.
3. Ibid..... December 20, 1806.
Page 3, Column 5.
4. The Republican & Savannah Evening Ledger; February 2, 1808.
Page 2, Column 2.
5. The Columbia Museum & Savannah Advertiser; September 3, 1807.
6. Chatham County Marriage Records; Abstracts, 1805-1852.
Names listed by year of marriage. Scribner-1808.
7. Ibid.....Scribner-1808.
8. The Georgia Republican & Savannah Evening Ledger; April 18, 1809, Page 3, Column 2.
9. Savannah Tax Digests.....1809.
Names listed in alphabetical groups, Scribner
10. The Republican & Savannah Evening Ledger; January 3, 1810.
Page 3, Column 4.
11. The Columcia Museum & Savannah Advertiser; June 23, 1810.
Page 4, Column 1.
12. The Republican & Savannah Evening Ledger; April 5, 1810.
Page 3, Column 1.
13. Ibid.....April 5, 1810.
Page 3, Column 1.
14. Ibid.....July 31, 1810.
Page 1, Column 4--Page 3, Column 4.
15. Ibid.....December 20, 1810.
Page 3, Column 2.
16. Ibid.....January 3, 1811.
Page 4, Column 3.
17. Ibid.....September 19, 1811.
Page 3, Column 2.
18. Ibid.....March 26, 1811.
Page 3, Column 4.

Endnotes (contd.)

19. Ibid.....June 11, 1811.
Page 3, Column 2.
20. Ibid.....June 13, 1811.
Page 3, Column 3.
21. Ibid.....July 4, 1811.
Page 3, Column 4.
22. Ibid.....September 24, 1811.
Page 3, Column 3.
23. Savannah Tax Digests.....1811.
Names listed in alphabetical groups; Scribner.
24. The Republican & Savannah Evening Ledger; December 10, 1811.
Page 3, Column 3.
25. The Columbia Museum & Savannah Advertiser; January 2, 1812.
Page 4, Column 4.
26. The Republican & Savannah Evening Ledger; March 5, 1812.
Page 3, Column 4.
27. Ibid.....January 23, 1812.
Page 3, Column 3.
28. Ibid.....February 17, 1812.
Page 3, Column 4.
29. Ibid.....July 14, 1812.
Page 3, Column 2.
30. Ibid.....September 17, 1812.
Page 3, Column 1.
31. The Savannah Tax Digests.....1813.
Names listed in alphabetical groups, Scribner.
32. The Columbia Museum & Savannah Advertiser; April 12, 1817.
Page 3, Column 2.
33. Annals of Georgia Mortuary Schedules; Carolyn Price Wilson.
Braid and Hutton Inc, Savannah, Georgia.....Page 89.
34. Ibid.....Page 108.
35. Ibid.....Page 120.
36. Ibid.....Page 255.

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1. The Index to Newspapers of Savannah, Georgia; 1806-1810.
2. Ibid.....1811-1815.
3. Ibid.....1816-1820.
4. Chatham County Marriage Records; Abstracts....1805-1852.
5. Marriages and Deaths; 1763 to 1820. Extracted from Extant Georgia Newspapers. Mary Bondurant Warren, Heritage Papers Danielsville, Georgia.
6. Annals of Georgia Mortuary Schedules, Including the Records of Colonial Cemetary; Carolyn Price Wilson, Braid & Hut-ton Inc. Savannah, Georgia.
7. Savannah Tax Digests.....1809.
8. Ibid.....1811.
9. Ibid.....1813.
10. General Index to Wills, Administrations, Etc. of Chatham County.....volume 2, L-Z.